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MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME
Helena, Montana 59601

ATTACHMENT TO FG-27
Environmental Impact Statement for the
Acquisition of the Mount Haggin Ranch

Summary of Comments and Responses to Comments

February 11, 1976

DISTRIBUTION

The original distribution of the draft statement was 167 copies. In addition, 23 were sent upon request and 63 were available and distributed at the public hearing. Total distribution was approximately 253 copies.

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES

The public hearing was held in Anaconda on February 2, 1976. Approximately 150 people attended.

A total of 32 written communications were received as comments through February 11, 1976. Of these, 20 supported the proposed acquisition; 4 were against it; 5 were from individuals with some common interest in the property or who had suggestions about the future management and operations efforts after the acquisition. The other 3 were from other agencies which provided routine minor corrections or suggestions for additions to the statement. The most significant was from the U. S. Forest Service who helped draft the statement and whose comments are discussed later. A number of the letters supporting the proposal (and one which opposed) were from representatives of large organizations who spoke for their membership. Support also included a 500 name petition which was presented at the hearing. Another petition containing 30 names in support of the acquisition was received later. During the hearing, 13 people spoke in favor of and 4 spoke against the proposed action. Others provided additional information or asked questions.

Of the total 8 people who expressed opposition to the acquisition, only one called into question the completeness or accuracy of the draft statement. Other opponents to the acquisition were concerned about the negative impacts of the action which were already acknowledged in the draft statement.

Specifically, the challenge to the draft itself was that it did not address the market value of the lost carrying capacity of the ranch (2,250 animal unit-beef).

The draft does, in fact, address this loss, but in a different form; i.e., (1) Lost tax revenue; (2) Lost employment; (3) Lost income from ranch employees; (4) Expenditures for ranch operations; and (5) Secondary losses to the local economy from (2) above.

The revenue which would have been received from the lost beef in addition to employment, taxes and operation costs, specifically profits, would go to the out-of-state owner and would not accrue to, or be spent in, Deer Lodge County.

Listed below are the objections voiced by those who opposed the acquisition (but not the validity of the draft statement). Each objection is followed by a response.

1. Objection: Private land will be taken from the tax rolls, thereby increasing the tax burden on the remaining taxpayers.

Response: This is true. The extent of that loss is thoroughly discussed in the draft.

2. Objection: A high percentage of land in Deer Lodge County will be placed in public ownership. It is felt that increasing public ownership from 34 to 58 per cent of the land area puts too much of a burden on the remaining tax base.

Response: The draft was explicit on this point as well. Overwhelmingly, the majority of the respondents felt the benefits outweighed this adverse effect.

3. Objection: This purchase would be an unwise expenditure of large amounts of public funds.

Response: The weight of support seems to indicate overwhelming support for that expenditure.

4. Objection: The purchase would be harmful to the ranching by reducing available grazing area and as a result market beef.

Response: Again, this trade-off was covered in the draft. The point about beef profits was clarified above.

5. Objection: Elk (game animals) and hunters use the land now anyway and therefore the acquisition is not necessary.

Response: The draft addresses this consideration in pointing out that private ownership does not assure this condition for the future. In addition, important winter elk range will be available for management to increase herd productivity after acquisition.

6. Objection: Potential loss of grazing in the Deep Creek drainage caused one person to respond unfavorably.

Response: As the draft points out, grazing will be permitted only where it is beneficial to the range and to wildlife. There probably will be a reduction in domestic stock grazing.

7. Comment: Enter instead into agreements with private owners to provide recreation access. Spend money to improve hunter/landowner relations.

Response: This is part of the overall statewide strategy of the Department of Fish and Game. It is not a viable option on this property because the potential private owner's attitude is not known at this time.

Suggestions were offered for the management of the property after the acquisition. They include:

1. Close coordination between agencies and adjacent property owners.
2. Careful regulation of recreation access, hunting seasons and game harvests.
3. Minimum recreational developments.
4. Rest-rotation grazing agreements.
5. Buying additional lands, especially the wet lands near Warm Springs.
6. Careful protection of historic and cultural values.
7. Reclassification of State Land Board inholdings to recreational purposes. Three sections are involved.

All of the above, except for number 7 which was overlooked, were addressed in the draft. Comment number 7 will be further addressed through negotiations with the Department of State Lands.

The environmental impact statement process revealed two previously unknown (to the agencies) parties who have interests in the property:

1. One was the operator of a small silica mine in the Lost Creek Unit. His mineral rights will be respected. They do not go with the property to the agencies.
2. The other was a family who retains the right to build a summer home and the right to hunt and fish on approximately 160 acres on the Continental Divide Unit. Those rights will be thoroughly investigated and if valid, respected.

In both cases, the agencies will actively work with these two parties and efforts made to establish mutually satisfactory arrangements for management of the properties.

Representatives of the U. S. Forest Service had the following comments:

1. It is highly probable that the timber contract with Louisiana Pacific would not be renewed after 1988. This would reduce timber production except for select cutting for management purposes after that time.
2. It should be emphasized that it is not known at this time how much acreage, if any, would be available for grazing livestock. Grazing will be allowed when it is considered beneficial for range or wildlife management purposes. Public notice will be given concerning any intent to lease Fish and Game or U. S. Forest Service lands.
3. Clarification that the Forest Service 25 per cent fund is calculated from net receipts, not gross receipts and that, therefore, would be less 25% of \$50,000. Net receipts subtract costs of reforestation and stand improvement.

FINAL STATEMENT

On the basis of the comments received, the draft statement appears to be adequate. The draft, together with these additional remarks, is therefore being circulated as the FINAL STATEMENT.

Copies of all correspondence and the hearing transcript may be viewed at the office of: James A. Posewitz, Administrator
Environment and Information Division
Montana Department of Fish and Game
Sam W. Mitchell Building
Helena, Montana 59601

PROPOSED ACTION

The U. S. Forest Service and the Department of Fish and Game, as a result of the environmental impact statement process, have determined that the proposed acquisition is a proper action which would be in the public interest, and after having waited the required 60 days from the initiating of the process (March 12) intend to acquire the described lands.

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